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ABSTRACT

An experiment investigated the effectiveness of communication games in monolingual classes in English as a second language (ESL). It studied the reactions of both teachers and students to the regular use of the games, and the ways in which the games fostered language learning. Four Hungarian teachers of English used the technique with seven groups of teenaged ESL students for whom English was the second foreign language. Eight games were used. Six practiced one language function, describing people, and two were traditional board games. Teachers were encouraged to use the games in any way they chose, and discussed the games often with the experimenter. Class sessions were observed and recorded for analysis and questionnaires were administered to students and teachers. Preliminary conclusions include the following: games have great motivating force; communication games provide good opportunity for natural student interaction in unpredictable situations; this type of game can be used effectively with monolingual groups; error rates are similar to those in controlled practice exercises, but more errors are left uncorrected; teachers do not fully exploit the potential of language games in the classroom; and such games force teachers to change their role and give more time and space for students. Game descriptions/instructions are appended. (MSE)

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COMMUNICATION GAMES - ARE THEY REALLY EFFECTIVE?

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COMMUNICATION GAMES - ARE THEY REALLY EFFECTIVE?

Maria Matheidesz, International House Budapest, Hungary

The talk reported on the procedure and preliminary results of an experiment which tested the effectivity of communication games in monolingual EFL classes.

The experiment, which was funded by the Soros Foundation, New York, started with the participation of 4 secondary school teachers in October 1986 and was to be finished by October 1988.

The main aims of the experiment were:

1) to study the reaction of both teachers and students to the regular use of communication games in EFL classes,
2) to encourage teachers to use communication games more extensively in their teaching,
3) to observe where and how these games foster language learning.

Background to the experiment

THE TEACHERS were 4 Hungarian teachers of English who volunteered to participate in the experiment. Apart from their teaching jobs, two of them work as teacher trainers, one of them is the English inspector of all secondary schools in Budapest.

THE STUDENTS of the 7 groups which took part in the experiment were between 14 and 18. Some of the groups studied English as a foreign language along with their other major subjects, some specialized in English. In both cases English was their second foreign language, as Russian is compulsory for all secondary school pupils. Most of these students would like to continue their studies at colleges and universities, few of them want to study languages at the university.

The groups consisted of an avarage of 15-20 students, both boys and girls. They represented a heterogeneous cross section of Hungarian secondary school

pupils and offered a great variety of age, interest, as well as level of English.

All the groups were monolingual, where both the students and the teacher had one common language, i.e. Hungarian.

THE ACTIVITIES: 7 of the 8 games were designed by the author. 6 activities concentrated on the language practice of one language function, i.e. describing people. Five of these games were to be played with the same set of picture cards called SPEAKING FACES. (Maria Matheidesz, Babilon, Budapest 1987)

In these games students had to describe people's faces in order to identify them or to select cartain persons. Each activity was a real game in the sense that students had to aim at achieving a certain goal, like to bridge an information gap, act out a role play or simulation or carry out a task in a competition.

The two other games were traditional board games, one of them a shopping simulation, the other one a discussion game.

(The description of each game was given out on handouts which are enclosed.)

The procedure of the pilot study

1) Initially individual discussions with teachers were held, where the main aims of the experiment and the procedure were outlined.
2) Teachers were given a detailed description of the games, as well as the game sets.
3) Teachers were asked to try out the games by incorporating them into their teaching. The teachers were not restricted in any sense, they decided themselves how, when, how often and in which of their groups they introduced the games.
4) Possible modifications and changes in rules and experiences during the testing period were discussed regularly with individual teachers.

5) Lesson observations in each group took place at a later stage, when experiences were discussed in detail.

6) A questionnaire was filled in by each teacher and a different one by the students who took part in the study.

7) The data gained from feedback sessions, lesson observations and the questionnaires were analysed.

8) Two video recordings were made in each group at two different occasions.

9) The language of the recordings was transcribed by the individual teachers.

10) Teachers wrote a summary on their experience during the study.

11) The analysis of the language data gained from the recordings were analysed by the author.

The talk focussed on the results of the informal feedback which was gained from feedback sessions, lesson observations and questionnaires.

The positive reaction of teachers was well supported by the answers to the questions of the questionnaire. From the total 15 questions the talk selected only 7 which the author found most relevant and significant.

1) Was it difficult to fit in the games into the syllabus?

All the four teachers agreed that it was not, because the functions and the language forms which were practised during the games were part of the syllabus. They also agreed that without having the games, they would have invented their own free practice exercises.

2) How did students react to the games?

According to 3 teachers students reacted very positively. One teacher did not notice any special change in the students' attitude.

3) Did lesson preparation for the games take more time than usual?

2 of the teachers claimed that it did not, while 2 teachers said that they needed slightly more time.

4) Did you notice any problems in classroom management while using the games?

2 teachers answered that heir classroom management was basically the same as with other activities, while two teachers thought that the games were more enjoyable than other activities which had a beneficial influence on classroom management.

5) Did you find the games useful?

2 teachers found them very useful, 2 said they were useful.

6) Did you have discipline problems?

3 teachers found no special difficulties in free activities like games, although students tended to use more Hungarian than in controlled exercises. 1 teacher thought that her students were not used to the 'freedom' of games.

7) Did you have to change your attitude and role as a teacher?

All the 4 teachers agreed that they had to change their role as teacher in these activties and become more of an organizer than a controller.

The overall impression at the lesson observations was that the students thoroughly enjoyed the games. The selected 4 of the total 16 questions of the students' questionnaire, however, draw the attention to the fact that this valuable source of learning and education is hardly exploited by teachers.
The 81 students who filled in the questionnaire were asked to circle one or more answers or give other comments.

1) Do you ever play other games in the English lessons?

a/ rarely

b/ often

c/ regularly

d/ never

88% of the students chose rarely, which is remarkable if we consider that their teachers volunteered to participate in an experiment concentrating on the use of language games.

2) Do you like playing games during lessons?

a/ yes

b/ no

c/ depends on the game

41% of the students answered with yes, only 4% with no, and 55% said or added that it depended on the quality of the game.

3) In what other lessons do you play games?

61% of the students replied that they never played games in other lessons, 27% claimed that they played games in P.E. lessons, 4% mentioned the Russian lesson and 8% the Hungarian literature lesson.

4) What do you think of games at school?

a/ a challenge

b/ great fun

c/ relaxing

d/ childish

e/ boring

f/ the same as other activities

g/ more interesting than other activities

h/ comments:

22% chose the answer great fun, 13% thought it was a challenge, 24% considered games relaxing, 21% thought games were more interesting than other activities, 4% said they were boring.

After this short summary of the feedback, video recordings of different groups were shown. The rather positive feedback in the questionnaires was well demonstrated on the video films.

Even the short excerpts showed the full involvement of students in these activities.

The recordings were made in the school of the particular groups so that a relatively stress free environment could be created. The teachers were asked to give a normal lesson in which they demonstrated 2-4 games, while the camera scanned the class and recorded students at random.

Two of the teachers just gave out the games and let their students play freely, the other two teachers fitted the games into a well structured lesson.

One common feature of all the lessons was that the teachers had to remain in the background and give the students space and time for talking during the games.

In the last part of the talk the main principles of the language analysis were outlined. It will include a linguistic analysis of the comprehensible transcribed utterances, an error analysis, the description of the learning and communication strategies and the interaction pattern of the games.

The evaluation of the language used during the games will be compared with the data of two control lessons, where two different teachers used other kinds of activities for the practice of the same language functions.

Finally the preliminary conclusions of the pilot study were drawn:

1) games have a great motivating force,
2) communication games provide a good opportunity for natural student-student interaction in which language learners can use the target language confidently in unpredictable situations,
3) communication games can be used effectively in monolingual groups
4) no considerably more mistakes and errors are made by students than in

controlled practice exercises,

5) however, more mistakes and errors are left uncorrected,

6) teachers do not fully exploit the potentials of language games in EFL classrooms,

7) language games force teachers to change their role and give more time and space for students.

RUNNING ERRANDS: A COMMUNICATION BOARD GAME

Maria Matheidesz

Abstract: Games for language learning attempt to provide an appropriate framework in which language learners are motivated and feel free to use the foreign/second language.
The framework and the rules of the board game described in this article can be exploited effectively to teach and practice language and communication skills in simulated situations.

Learning objectives

RUNNING ERRANDS is a game which has validity in two main areas:

a) the development of language skills and communication strategies in simulated situations

b) the development of social skills and the provision of cultural background knowledge

Both the language and the cultural content of the game can be exploited in two basic learning situations:

(i) with foreign/second language learners of any age, especially those who learn the language in another culture, *i e* out of the country where the foreign/second language is used

(ii) with young children of any language background to practice communication skills as part of their social studies, and to develop language skills in their own mother tongue.

Both the linguistic and the social/cultural teaching objectives can be focused on at the same time in either of the above situations, or the teacher can give priority to either of them by adapting the rules or the board and the instruction cards to the main aim of the activity.

The game

The game requires three different activities from the players:

1. recognizing and understanding the names of shops, offices, and facilities in a town.
2. selecting the places they need for completing their tasks and working out a strategy for moving on the board.
3. acting out meaningful conversations in order to move on the board.

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Simulation/Games for Learning Vol 17 No 3 September 1987

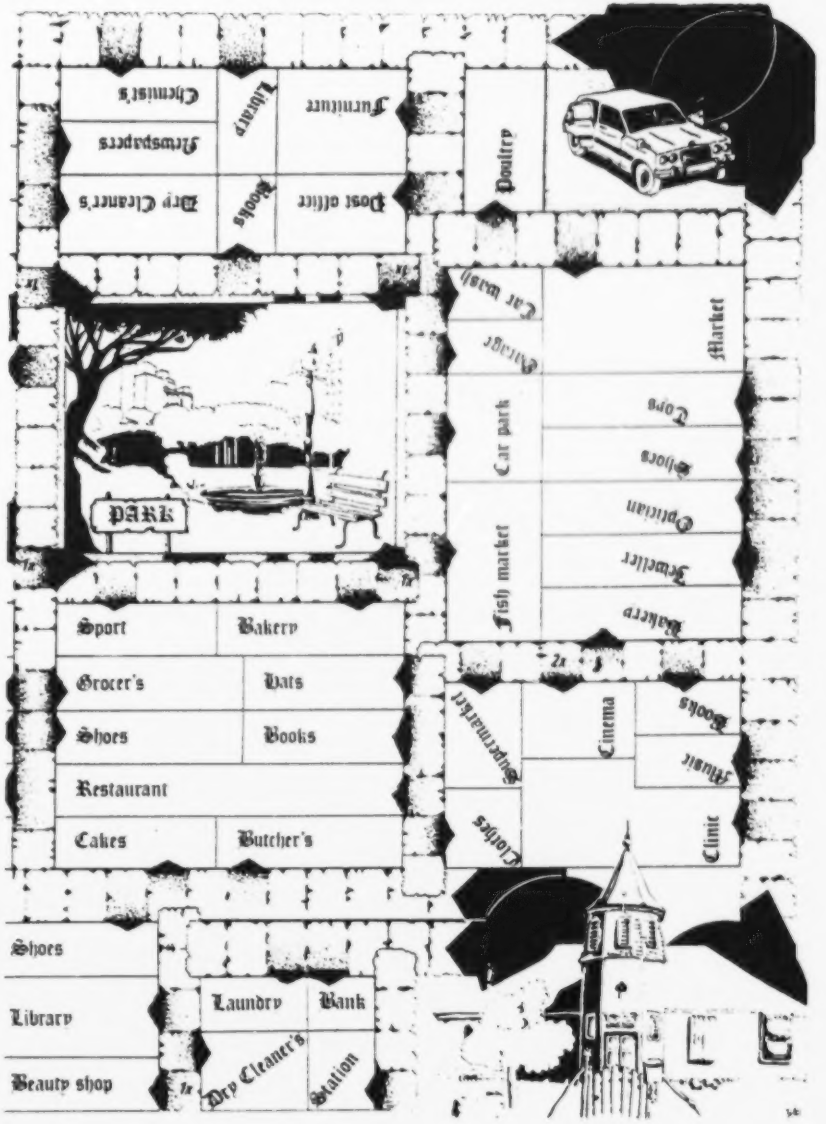

Figure: RUNNING ERRANDS – An example of a board.

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The game can be played at all language levels. The exchange of information can be very simple, can follow a strict pattern or include all kinds of interaction without any limitations.

As a teaching game for use in the classroom, the game has been designed to allow up to ten players to participate. A minimum of three players is essential, but the game gets really interesting with four or more players.

I have used RUNNING ERRANDS successfully with students of English aged 10–18 and also in adult language classes in Hungary for consolidating the vocabulary of shopping and running errands, as well as the language forms of different functions in English, like greeting/thanking people, polite requests, asking for/giving information, describing objects, asking for objects *etc.*

The game has special validity in Hungary, where the structure of commerce differs considerably from that of Britain.

Game guidelines

Preparation

- Explain the main focus of the game to the players and give necessary information about background knowledge required.
- Explain the rules of the game.

Equipment

- 1 rectangular board (size approximately 50 × 70 cm) (see Figure)
- a set of dice
- counters (1 for each player)
- 15 penalty cards
- 60 instruction cards

The penalty cards

5 penalty cards indicate: CLOSED
Come back after 3 turns

5 penalty cards indicate: BANKRUPT
Find another place or miss 2 turns

5 penalty cards indicate: OUT OF STOCK
Come back after two turns

5 penalty cards indicate: NOT READY
Miss 1 turn

The instruction cards

The instruction cards indicate different errands, for example:

- Take your suit or dress to the dry cleaner's
- Reserve a table at a restaurant for tonight for four people
- Fetch your glasses
- Buy a women's magazine
- Go shopping: cheese, hamburger, 1 lb of mince, gift for Granny
- Buy two cinema tickets
- Get some traveller's cheques
- Post two letters
- Send a telegram
- Do your daily shopping: buy 5 different items
- Get the daily paper or a magazine
- Get some cigarettes
- Book two flight tickets
- Make inquiries about the departure/arrival of the London train
- Collect your washing
- Get a Kodak colour film developed
- Get your car washed
- Get a photo taken of yourself
- Get your hair cut
- Arrange an appointment with your doctor
- Your car has run out of petrol
- Your tennis racket is broken, buy another one
- You have left your towel in the swimming pool, try to find it
- You have saved up £50, go and spend it. Buy at least two different items
- You need a pair of gym shoes/a writing pad and rubber/some aspirin

The list of instructions is open ended. The selection of tasks offers a wide range of varieties of topics and scenes and extends the adaptability of the game. As a variation, a list compiled by the teacher can be distributed to each player.

The board itself can also be modified in many different ways: map of a village/town, a district of a big city, a shopping centre, a market *etc.*

How to play the game

Each player draws one penalty card and six instruction cards. (The number of instruction cards drawn can vary according to the number of players or the time provided for the game.) The instruction cards go together to form a list of errands for the players. A few minutes are allowed now for the players to work out the most sensible route for running their errands. The object of the game is to reach the black

squares on the board where the tasks given on the instruction cards can be carried out, and then to get back to the car park as soon as possible. The winner of the game is who gets back first to the car park with all his instruction cards face down, *i e* with all his errands completed.

Each player sets his counter on the square CAR PARK. The first player throws the dice and moves in any direction on the board according to the number indicated on the dice. If he lands on a place he does not need for any of his errands, the next player throws the dice. (The game is played in the anti-clockwise direction.) The players take their turns at throwing the dice until one of the players reaches a square where he intends to carry out one of his errands. He then turns to the player on his right, *i e* the next player, and they act out the conversation simulating the real situation.

An example of play

The player lands on the black square which leads to the optician and he has the instruction card 'Fetch your glasses'.

The player (S1): *Good morning*!
His partner (S2): *Good morning, Sir*!
S1: *I wonder if my new glasses are ready yet.*
S2: *Just a moment, Sir. I'll have a look. Can I have your name, please*?
S1: *John White.*
S2: *John White? Yes, here they are. Would you like to try them on? etc.*

After the conversation has been acted out, the player places his instruction card face down in front of himself. The player who has been involved in the conversation gets a bonus of two steps on the board, and now it is his turn to throw the dice. If the player who is involved in the conversation happens to have the penalty card NOT READY, he is free to use it to delay his partner. The conversation between the two players might sound like this:

S1: *Good morning*!
S2: *Good morning, Sir*!
S1: *Could you tell me if my glasses are ready yet*?
S2: *What's your name, Sir*?
S1: *Chalker. Tom Chalker.*
S2: *Tom Chalker? I'm terribly sorry, Sir, but they are not ready yet. Could you please come back on Tuesday? etc.*

Each player can use his penalty card once during the whole game at any point where he acts as a partner in a conversation. Players, however, have to consider the limitations of the meaning of these cards! NOT READY used in a conversation in a shop is not acceptable for all situations.

If two players land on the same square — either white or black — they have to act out a conversation between two friends who meet in the street, *e g*

S1: *Hello, Jane. Where are you off to*?
S2: *Oh, just to the butcher's to get some mince for dinner. And you*?
S1: *I'm just about to find a present for my aunt.*
S2: *See you then*!
S1: *Bye*!

After the conversation has been finished, both players get a bonus of three steps on the board.

There are some squares on the board where each player who lands on that square gets a penalty. They have to miss turns according to the number indicated on the square, *e g*: swimming pool — miss 2 turns.

If a player does his shopping in a supermarket, he has to adapt his conversation to the situation, *e g*:

Excuse me, where can I find almonds, please.

Conclusion

I have found this game extremely relevant to everyday situations the language learner is likely to face, and highly adaptable to numerous speech situations. My students have enjoyed it very much, and it has always encouraged them to use structures and vocabulary they have learnt in other contexts.

The two risks of communication games and simulations, especially in monolingual groups, are that students refuse to talk or they switch over to their mother tongue in the excitement of the game. Neither of these two failures occurred while playing with this game.

The game fits into the learning process at the practice stage and should be preceded by an input phase and followed by a debriefing session. Depending on the main focus, the debriefing can aim at summarizing the language forms and points. The teacher here can concentrate on pointing out some typical mistakes the students have made, or just summarize and evaluate the language forms the players came up with during the activity.

If the main aim of the game is to find the right places for running the errands, the teacher can ask for the list of things which can be arranged in one particular shop or office and discuss problem cases.

As in most simulations and games the role of the teacher is that of an instructor who is available for reference and help either as an observer or a participant.

Correcting language mistakes constantly during the activity would spoil the spirit of the game, and it is up to teachers to decide the best way of correction. The players of the game, however, are very likely to correct each other and the debriefing which should also rely on feedback and information coming from the participants can serve as a good opportunity for discussing difficulty points.

To extend the variability of the game the best way of preparing the board is to draw a board with blank squares and get separate labels for the shops and offices ready. This enables teachers to use one board in different ways for different tasks and even in different languages. This can also give the game a new dimension: students can be invited to design their own shopping centre or town centre by labelling the squares on the board. Students can even get involved in the preparation of the labels and the instruction cards, which again extends the potential of the game.

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MONITORING

This feature monitors periodicals which regularly consist of articles on aspects of simulation and gaming. Copies do not always arrive regularly; each Monitoring entry therefore carries details and a critical summary only for whichever issues have been received since the last entry.

Reviewed in this issue:

Simulation and Games 17 4 (December 1986).

> This is an American international journal of simulation/gaming. The official publication of ISAGA, NASAGA and ABSEL, it is academic in style and contains articles and reviews of substantial length. Available from Sage Publications, 28 Banner Street, London, EC1Y 8QE. Subscriptions: individual $25pa, institutional $63pa.

The December 1986 issue of *Simulation and Games* contains five articles. In the first of these Jones, Dunlop and Bilodean describe their investigations into the potential of video games for use in psychological testing. Performance in video games was compared with performance in 12 cognitive tests which covered general intelligence, perceptual factors and spatial abilities. The games were AIR COMBAT MANOEUVERING, BREAKOUT, RACE CAR, SLALOM and ANTI-AIRCRAFT. The conclusion reached is that performance on the games is generally testing abilities other than those found by conventional tests. A finding, one would have thought, that was not unexpected.

The effectiveness of business games in terms of the real world of business is the area that interests Dwight R Norris. He reviews various attempts to investigate comparisons of, for example, game performance and real life performance as revealed, for example, by career profiles and salaries. However, as with internal validity, the quest for clarity in the use of operational concepts is subject to all the usual semantic confusion. Norris makes some useful suggestions in order to guide future research. These include controlling the size of organising agencies, categorising games and participants into taxonomies and ensuring large sample sizes. Similarly self evaluation by participants is seen to be a weakness.

The ubiquitous personal computer appears in Resnick's article concerning BUSTED, a therapeutic simulation/game for youthful

SPEAKING FACES is a collection of cards that can be used in a wide variety of ways to stimulate lanaguage practice. The portraits themselves are varied, detailed and clear. There are photos of people of all ages and from all walks of life. The picture set consists of two identical packs of 96 portraits of the same size. This allows a great number of students to use the cards at the same time, as well as for a great variety of selection.
The pack was originally designed for information gap activities to practise the language of description of appearances, features and expressions, but the pack can also stimulate the students to infer the individuals` personalities, and to create `backgrounds' to their lives.

Description of the games:

IDENTITY - Both members of a pair ask questions and give information in order to come up with the same arrangement of two indentical packs of cards, without looking at each other`s sets. The winner of the game is the pair which achieves this goal in the shortest time.

SUSPECTS - After players have seen a set of photos they try to remember them in order to identify one card turned face down on the table.

FIND THE PAIR - Players aim at collecting the greatest number of pairs of identical cards by asking questions and giving information about the photos, without looking at each other`s cards.

FIND THE CHARACTERS - Players link a set of photos with characters in a story or conversation they have listened to.Their choices are discussed and justified and a conversation among the chosen characters is acted out.

COMPUTER DATING - Photos of people and computer dating advertisements are matched up in order to create ideal couples. Choices are discussed and justified. As follow-up, a conversation at the first meeting is acted out.

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HEADS AND TAILS - where a set of magazine pictures is used. The pictures represent poeple with the whole body, cut in halves so that the heads and the bodies get on separate cards of the same size.
Players of groups take turns at describing bodies or heads and the other group tries to find the matching half.

CHRISTMAS PRESENTS - A BOARD GAME

Teaching aim: arguing, proving things

Number of players: 4-6

Equipment: board, a set of dice, 1 token for each player, 20 word cards with names of persons, 50 picture cards with different objects.

How to play the game:

The cards with the names are placed face down on the empty squares in the centre of the board. The picture cards are placed in a draw pile in the middle of the board.

The first player throws the dice and moves his token on the board the number of spaces indicated by the dice. If the player lands on a space without a name card, the next player takes his turn at throwing the dice. If the first player lands on a space with a name card, he picks it up and draws one picture card from the draw pile. The player has to give an explanation why he has bought the object on the picture card as a Christmas present for the person whose name is on the name card.

E.g.: the player draws a card with a football on it and his grandmother is indicated on the name card. He has to make up a good story to prove that the football is a good present for his grandmother.

The other players act as judge and decide by votes whether they accept the player's arguments. If the arguments are accepted by the majority of players, the arguer can move forward 5 spaces on the board with his token. If the judge does not accept the argumentation, the player has to move 5 squares backwards. In both cases the player replaces the name card on the square, and puts the picture card under the draw pile.

The object of the game is to move forward on the board as quickly as possible and reach the last square.

The winner of the game is the one who reaches the last square on the board with his token for the first time.